

Federico Fellini Season

Tuesday 03 March: I Vitelloni

Wednesday 18 March: Otto e Mezzo -8½-

Tuesday 31 March: Giulietta Degli Spiriti

Eden Court, Playhouse Cinema, at 19:15.



Federico Fellini on *Juliet of the Spirits* and the art of making films.

Juliet of the Spirits is a film told in a less realistic way than my previous ones. Juliet touches on myths within human psychology; its images, therefore, are those of a fable. But it treats of a profound human reality: the institution of marriage, and the need within it for individual liberation. It's the portrait of an Italian woman, conditioned by our modern society, yet a product of misshapen religious training and ancient dogmas—like the one about getting married and living happily ever after. When she grows up and finds it hasn't come true, she can neither face nor understand it; and so she escapes into a private world of remembered yesterdays and mythical tomorrows. Whatever she does is influenced by her childhood, which she recaptures in otherworldly visions; and by the future, which she brings to life in bizarre and lively fantasies. The present exists for her only in the electronic unreality of television commercials. She is finally awakened from these visions by a grim reality: the desertion of her husband; but this fulfilment of her worst fear becomes the most positive episode of her life, for it forces her to find herself, to seek her free identity as an individual. And this gives her the insight to realize that all the fears—the phantoms that lived around her—were monsters of her own creation,

bred of misshapen education and misread religion. She realizes that the spirits have been necessary, even useful, and deserve to be thanked; and the moment she thanks them, she no longer fears and hates them, and they turn into positive, pleasant beings.

If there is a message in my film, it is that marriage, if it is to survive, must be treated as the beginning, not as the happy ending; that it's something you have to work at; but that it's also not the alpha and omega of human existence; and that it must not be something you accept from the outside, like an inviolate taboo, never to be shattered. Why not admit it? Marriage as an institution needs re-examining. We live with too many non-functioning ideologies. Modern man needs richer relationships.

Man is not basically a monogamous animal. Marriage is tyranny, a violation and mortification of his natural instincts. A woman, on the other hand, tends to create a world around one man. The tragedy of modern man is that he needs a multiplicity of individual relationships, whereas, at least in the culture in which I live, he is still forced into a single-mated mould. Without it, his life could develop into something interesting, into a higher evolution. Curiously enough, the multiple roles of infidelity seem to bring out the best in some men; were it not for self-negating guilt, it might in most men.

As an Italian it is difficult biologically and geographically not to be a Catholic in Italy. It's like a creature born beneath the sea—how can it not be a fish? For one born in Italy, it's difficult not to breathe, from childhood onward, this Catholic atmosphere. One who comes from Italian parents passes a childhood in Italy, enters the Church as a baby, makes his Communion, one attends Catholic funerals—how can he not be a Catholic? Still, I have a great admiration for those who declare themselves a detached laity—but I don't see how this can happen in Italy. Sooner or later, however—even in Italy—every man must take stock of himself, to determine to what point he really is a Catholic, or perhaps not one at all.

But to come back to ***Juliet of the Spirits***, and actually to most of my films, once I find the flesh-and-blood incarnation of my fantasy characters—and it doesn't matter whether they're picked from the street or are professional actors and actresses—the next thing I try to do is to put them at ease, to strip them of their inhibitions, to make them forget technique, to transport them into a climate that allows them to laugh and cry and behave naturally. In other words, I endeavour to coax out the natural talents they already possess. If I have a method, it is to get their most spontaneous reaction. Every human being has his own irrevocable truth, which is authentic and precious and unique; and the truth of Anita Ekberg or Sandra Milo is no different from anyone else's. If the atmosphere is right, anybody can be made to express his joys, his sorrows, his hostilities, everything—entirely of his own accord, honestly and openly. I don't ever want to make the mistake of forcing someone into a given character, or of limiting him in any way. Instead, I try to let him re-create his own character for the role. Because of this, I think, my results are richer and more satisfactory; the spectator finds himself in the presence of a creature of unique truth.

My wife, Giulietta Masina, has starred in several of my films. When I work with her, she seems the ideal actress: patient, docile, obedient, serious. She's not difficult—I am. I'm more impatient with her than with other actors. I get irritated if she doesn't

immediately do what I have in mind. It seems incredible to me when she doesn't respond promptly just the way I want. You see, Giulietta is the first character I think about when I do a film with her. The others come slowly to mind, many months afterward, but always around her as the central figure. So when I get impatient and irritated with her, I feel like saying, "Giulietta! You were born first and the others came after you. You've lived in my mind so much longer than the others; why aren't you quicker?" I know that's unjust, but somehow it always goes that way. But I do like to work with her.



She is an excellent actress. I think that she would have interested me as such even if she hadn't been my wife. Her mimicry, for example, and that little round face which can express happiness or sadness with such poignant simplicity. That little figure, with its tenderness, its delicacy, fascinates me no end. Her type is crystallized, even stylized for me. As an actress, she represents a special type, a very specific humanity. And as a couple we've lived together so long. The other day on the set, we celebrated our twenty-first anniversary. Twenty-one years. It doesn't really seem that long. There are still things to discover.

Giulietta is tender, affectionate, always solicitous. She always wants to know if I feel cold or if I want to eat. When we're shooting outdoors, she asks if my socks are wet. You know how women are. But she is not only my wife; she is also the one who inspires me. Over the years, she has become a stimulant for me, a symbol of certain feelings, certain moods, certain behaviour. Our life together has been sprinkled with tragedy and joy, with tears and laughter, and this has given me material, inspiration for my work. She provides the sun and the rain that warms and waters the soil in which the seeds I sow eventually sprout—and occasionally flower into films.

The films that I make may not turn out to be the one I had in mind, but the main point is to see if, in the first two or three weeks of shooting, this thing is actually born alive. After that, it becomes self-sustaining—as though I were no longer

directing, but rather that the film were directing me, pulling me onward. What does matter is that I have a very precise idea of where I want to go in the film and how I want to get there long before the camera starts to roll. Once it does, of course, I try to remain flexible enough to amend and adorn the action as the need arises—rather than adhere blindly and fanatically to the original scenario as though it were Holy Scripture.

A film never ends abruptly for me. It leaves an echo, a trail, and I live with it. Even after I've finished shooting and cutting, it's still with me, I still hear it, feel it, I sense it. When it isn't with me anymore, when I feel it's finally extinguished, then another atmosphere enters, like the arrival of spring. It's the new film—with its new personages, and its undeveloped story. I don't experience blank periods. It seems that ever since I started as a director, it's been the same day—the same long, wonderful day. And when I finish a film, I'm possessed by the shaping vision of my next one; and it's always a jealous mistress. Besides, I want to live in the present, not linger in the past. As for other people's films, I go very, very seldom. I'd rather make films than watch them.

I will always continue making films in Italy. There I know what I'm doing. I know how to handle my actors, how to dress them, how to make them believable in the surroundings I've created for them. I know what I want them to express because I know what I am talking about myself. Even if I throw in an extra with one line, she has a reason to be there and she'll give truth to that one line and authenticity to those few seconds she's on screen. It's why an author must stay with the language that has nourished him since childhood, a language that has left with him a cultural deposit and a bagful of customs and traditions.

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Next: First in our Member's Season of favourite actors and actresses.

Tuesday 14 April 2020 Playhouse Cinema 19:15.

Maggie Smith in The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie

